SOUTH AFRICA IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

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Introduction

The Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR), Cape Town, South Africa, hosted a policy advisory group seminar at Erinvale Estate, Western Cape, South Africa, from 19 to 20 November 2012 on “South Africa in Southern Africa”.

The meeting focused on seven key themes relating to regional integration in Southern Africa: the history of regionalism; peace and security; the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) and South Africa’s development finance institutions (DFIs); democratic governance; South Africa’s sub-regional role; migration and food security; and the role of the European Union (EU) and China.

1. The History of Regionalism in Southern Africa: From SADCC to SADC

The Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) was launched in 1980 to reduce the sub-region’s economic dependence on South Africa and to support the struggle against the apartheid state. The Conference’s nine founding members comprised the Frontline States (FLS) – Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe – as well as Malawi. In 1992, the bloc expanded to include Namibia and renamed itself the Southern African Development Community (SADC), becoming a treaty-based organisation that adopted shared values including the pursuit of integrated development, peace and stability, and “good governance” in the sub-region; and the establishment of sub-regional institutions to support these goals. South Africa joined the Community after its first democratic election in 1994. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Madagascar, Mauritius, and Seychelles subsequently joined the bloc.

During the transition from a Conference to a Community, some inherited models of integrated energy production and supply, railway transport, and university education were dismantled, although new sub-regional energy and transport projects have subsequently rebuilt trans-national capacities.

Angola has replaced Zimbabwe, which previously occupied a leadership role in SADC, as Southern Africa’s second largest economy, and its evolving strategic relationship with South Africa could drive sub-regional development. However, Tshwane’s ability to promote greater inter-governmentalism in Southern Africa is constrained by its domestic socio-economic challenges, and the legacy inherited from SADCC of a minimalist integration agenda that confirmed the inviolate sovereignty of member states. The continuing prevalence of some autocratic regimes in Southern Africa has stymied the adoption of common political values, resulting in non-compliance with sub-regional norms, and weakening SADC’s institutions. The sense of a shared Southern African identity has been further undermined by the multiplication of SADC members, although the enlarged 15-member bloc has brought the benefits of more diversified trade. Region-building efforts have also been inhibited by the adoption of inappropriate free-market models for development, and unrealistic timetables for economic integration.
2. Peace and Security

In the past decade, the number of wars in the SADC sub-region has fallen, although political instability continues in Zimbabwe; Madagascar remains riven by a constitutional crisis; violent protests have broken out in Mozambique, Malawi, and Swaziland since 2009; and civil war has persisted in the DRC since 1996. The creation of the SADC Brigade (SADCBRIG) – Southern Africa’s contribution to the African Standby Force (ASF) – is relatively advanced. In December 2012, SADC’s Organ on Politics, Defence, and Security Cooperation (OPDSC) decided to deploy a 4,000-strong force to the eastern Congo. The move has highlighted uncertainty over which body (the AU or sub-regional organisations) can authorise interventions – and the issue of how collective military decisions should be taken within SADC. To ensure properly capacitated missions that meet African needs, the division of labour between SADC and the United Nations (UN) must also be clearly defined. Fears over SADCBRIG’s dependence on South Africa’s defence capacity, compounded by Tshwane’s leadership ambitions on the wider continent, have led to calls for greater inter-state military planning and training. The shifting dynamics of global demand for sub-regional natural resources can shape Southern African conflicts beyond the control of SADC.

SADC should pursue a more preventive approach to security premised on shared values. South Africa has led conflict mediation initiatives in Lesotho, Zimbabwe, and the DRC, following a model that seeks to establish an interim government of national unity that can pave the way to elections. However, SADC mediation efforts have often remained ad hoc, and have sometimes been disrupted by the annual changes of membership in the Organ’s Troika.

3. Regional Integration: SACU, the DBSA, and the IDC

SADC’s integrated development efforts, including its free trade area (FTA) introduced in 2008 (but still a work in progress in 2013), have led to the removal of trade barriers and the increased movement of goods, people, and capital across borders. However, the economic dominance of South Africa, which accounts for over 80 percent of SADC’s trade, and Tshwane’s inconsistency in its efforts to develop the sub-region, have exacerbated the economic polarisation of Southern Africa. SACU has not created a single cross-border project in its more than 100 years of existence. Furthermore, South Africa’s economy remains outward-looking, with about 90 percent of its trade conducted beyond the sub-region. Since 1994, South Africa has sought greater integration into the world economy, joining the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) grouping in 2011, prioritising the creation of a tripartite FTA between SADC, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), and the East African Community (EAC) by 2014, and promoting deals with external trade blocs. Questions have been raised about the relative benefits that may accrue to South Africa rather than its neighbours from these new arrangements.
However, South Africa has also championed infrastructure building in the sub-region through its Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) and Industrial Development Corporation (IDC). The DBSA has sought to support sub-regional energy, telecommunications, and transport infrastructure projects, and to promote exports and economic diversification in mining, tourism, manufacturing, and agri-business. The Bank also encourages investor confidence in markets that other financial institutions may consider too challenging, such as Zimbabwe. However, the DBSA has been criticised for not consulting sufficiently within the sub-region.

4. Democratic Governance

Southern African governments have generally established electoral machineries that meet SADC’s standards and address nation-building concerns. More than 50 national polls were held between 1989 and 2005 in the sub-region. Although electoral disputes and violence remain serious challenges, an increasing number of these have been resolved through mediation. The roles of political parties, parliaments, judiciaries, and civil society are also being strengthened to ensure the transparency of polls. However, the rules governing the democratic system are often applied unevenly, undermining the impartiality and independence of the process.

Furthermore, only Angola, Mozambique, and South Africa have exceeded the 30 percent benchmark set by SADC in 1997 for the representation of women in national legislatures. The politics of patronage and a lack of democratic participation beyond elections can also frustrate citizens, turning polls into ritualistic exercises and impeding development.

In the DRC, stability is now more likely to be provided by steps to strengthen the authority and accountability of the government in Kinshasa than by actions to counter Rwandan incursions. South Africa has the capacity to lead sub-regional efforts to foster more democratic processes in Southern Africa, but could be constrained by the intransigence of regimes such as those in Swaziland and Zimbabwe.

5. South Africa in Southern Africa: Progress, Problems, and Prospects

Africa’s economy has been growing by more than five percent a year. However, demand for the continent’s minerals may slow soon, and infrastructural constraints also continue to hamper Africa’s growth prospects. SADC’s integration efforts have had limited success in liberalising and boosting trade across Southern Africa. The establishment of SADC’s customs union, which was supposed to begin in 2010 – followed by a common market by 2015, a monetary union by 2016, and a common currency by 2018 – has presented the challenges of creating joint external tariffs, equitable revenue-sharing, and common trade and industrial policies, with no guarantee that the results would significantly boost sub-regional trade.
Tshwane has identified equitable industrialisation of the continent as a fundamental priority in Africa, and is championing the tripartite FTA to create the necessary economies of scale to compete globally. However, fears have been expressed that South Africa is abandoning agreed sub-regional development priorities in pursuit of its grander economic goals and leadership aspirations on the continent. South Africa has encouraged outward investors to form joint-venture partnerships with local companies, and to source goods and services locally, although some South African companies have been criticised for their “mercantilist” behaviour in the sub-region.

6. Human Security: Migration and Food Security

From 1911, South Africa’s mines, farms, and industry attracted hundreds of thousands of workers from neighbouring countries, and migrant labour became a major source of revenue for Mozambique, Malawi, and Lesotho. From 1995 to 1997, South African citizenship was granted to about 124,000 migrant workers. By 1999, 55 percent of the country’s miners came from neighbouring countries. However, although South Africa remains a magnet for migrant workers, Tshwane still does not regard such labour as a vector for increased intra-regional trade. Its immigration policy is based on a protectionist approach that has sometimes fuelled xenophobia.

A series of food crises in Southern Africa have been compounded by frequent droughts and floods. Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe have confronted serious problems in ensuring sufficient food for their populations. Lessons should be learnt from SADC’s effective coordination of food aid during a drought in 1992, and, by contrast, the inadequate response to a food crisis in Lesotho twenty years later in 2012. Pressures on food supply and quality are likely to be exacerbated by increasing urbanisation, high poverty levels, and rising food prices, all of which could foment serious social instability. SADC should therefore adapt its policy framework to promote the diversification of agricultural outputs, increased intra-regional trade in food, greater investment in farming, and improved equipment and technological expertise in this sector.

7. External Actors: The EU and China

The 27-member European Union’s trade relations with Africa seek to secure a supply of primary products to feed European industry and consumers, and a market for its exports of processed goods. The EU’s negotiation of separate trade deals in Southern Africa – including interim Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) signed with Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, and Mozambique in 2008, and with Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Zimbabwe in 2009 – have exacerbated divisions among SADC’s member states and constrained the bloc’s power to direct economic policy in the sub-region. Trade between the EU and South Africa is shaped by the Trade, Development, and Cooperation Agreement (TDCA) of 1999 and Tshwane’s relationship with Brussels as one of the EU’s ten strategic economic partners.
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globally. The TDCA has been criticised for having failed to take into account South Africa’s SACU allies or SADC’s trade protocols.

China has established robust trade ties in Southern Africa in line with its national interests. However, initial optimism about the benefits of investment by Beijing has been tempered by Chinese vertically-integrated business models that demand few African inputs. In order to redress asymmetrical economic relations that are largely shaped by China, African actors need to be more proactive in prioritising their own development agendas.

Policy Recommendations

The following 10 key policy recommendations emerged from the policy advisory group seminar:

1. A team of individuals and countries that can drive regional integration in SADC is needed to provide leadership within Southern Africa. The adoption by South Africa of a legitimate leadership role within SADC must be based on its capacity to facilitate equitable and mutually beneficial cooperation, rather than an assumption of economic dominance. Tshwane should provide assurances to smaller states in the sub-region that it poses no threat to them, while establishing sub-regional alliances with anchor states such as Angola, in order to forge the necessary Southern African consensus;

2. To ensure properly capacitated peacekeeping missions that meet African needs, the division of labour between SADC, the AU, and the UN must be clearly defined. SADC’s standby brigade should be a rapid reaction force that is brought under the UN’s umbrella within no more than six months after it has been deployed. A group of SADC elders could be established to mediate and oversee the implementation of the sub-regional body’s peace plans;

3. SADC should refocus on key sectors such as food security, water, transport, energy, and communications, and be directly present in the lives of its 257 million citizens in order to gain popular participation in region-building efforts. The organisation lacks bureaucratic capacity and should adopt a decentralised approach that seeks to mobilise sectoral projects and harnesses their institutional capacity to long-term region-building;

4. South Africa needs to link its rhetorical support for the equitable industrialisation of the continent to SADC’s practical integration efforts, eschewing inappropriate free-market models and unrealistic timetables for economic integration. The country should seek greater input from the sub-regional body on the trade facilitation programmes undertaken by the Development Bank of Southern Africa;
5. Africa needs to take advantage of increased demand for its commodities and diversify beyond traditional providers of finance to source the cheapest capital available to create infrastructure that will support the continent’s growth. Infrastructure construction should seek to achieve the broader goal of helping people and goods to move faster and further across Southern Africa, thus supporting the diversification of production and trade, as well as the creation of jobs;

6. SADC must keep sight of the importance of setting minimum realisable standards for ‘good governance’ - such as the holding of credible free and fair multi-party elections - in order to safeguard democratic gains. The sub-regional body should be accorded powers of enforcement so that non-compliance with its instruments comes at a high price to member states;

7. It is important to frame the debate about democratic aspirations beyond the regularity of elections. External actors should not be afforded a decisive role in supporting national governments; opposition parties need to be treated as legitimate political actors; the roles of parliaments as agents of accountability and democratisation should be improved; and the diverse interests of civil society must be fully represented in government;

8. In order to encourage companies to become responsible sub-regional citizens, South Africa should seek to formulate and implement a corporate code of conduct that would foster economic diversification and promote common values;

9. SADC should establish a focal point to promote the sub-region’s interests more effectively in EPA negotiations with the EU, with Tshwane providing strategic support for this. Brussels should agree to strengthen SADC’s negotiating and regulatory capacity as a sub-regional trade organisation, and should also support the development of agricultural production in Southern Africa by abolishing the 50 billion Euro annual subsidies that it extends to its own farmers. SADC should be more proactive in promoting a common approach for China’s engagement in the sub-region, and should seek to reinforce the negotiating capacity of its member states to ensure that they conclude enforceable and mutually beneficial economic agreements; and

10. South Africa needs to adopt a coherent multi-disciplinary strategy on immigration that moves beyond regarding the phenomenon as a threat to state and societal security, and promotes migration as a tool for diversifying intra-regional trade and boosting economic growth. On food security, SADC should strengthen its early warning mechanisms, improve its transport corridors, and promote the creation of integrated agricultural value-chains that balance production with nutrition and promote the economic development of Southern Africa.